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MY CONVERSION TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH

The facility with which some converts have described the processes by which they found their way to the Catholic Church has always amazed me and aroused a certain feeling of envy. For my own part, it has invariably been a difficult assignment to sit down and attempt to detail the story of my approach to the Church. In the first place, and I say this without any illusion of false humility, it is not a particularly stirring or important story. In the second place, I confess to a certain distaste for advertising my personal adventure in grace. There, doubtless, emerges the irreducible puritan in my make-up. But if the narrative, for all it lacks of the spectacular, may serve as aid and comfort for those embarked on the same pilgrimage I made so many years ago, that is reason enough for embalming it in print. The editor of *The Epistle* assures me that such is the case, and I hereby bow to his judgment.

I was born in the very heart of American Protestantism, the Middle West in the '80's of the last century. It is hard for me to evaluate, much less to put in writing, the debt I owe my parents. They gave me a good home; they set before me a constant example of plain living and honest thinking. Devout Methodists, their faith was untinged with fanaticism, and they stood four-square for all those principles of fundamental Christianity upon which the nation itself had been built and preserved through the ordeal of the Civil War which was still a living memory to them.

With my hand in my mother's I was introduced as a youngster to the mysteries of Sunday School. Vivid memories

of those days survive, colored by the Bible stories, conned and repeated, and the prints and the chromos which were a part of the familiar apparatus. As I advanced in years, I was introduced to the regular church services, and at some date, in my early 'teens, I formally "joined the Church."

During this period of unclouded faith, what were my beliefs? As closely as I can clarify them now, they would seem to have been straightforwardly and typically Christian. There was certainly no question as to the existence and spirituality of God. With equal certitude I accepted the divinity of Jesus Christ, though it may well have been that an analysis of my belief would have revealed its imprecision and lack of any positive intellectual basis. As for the Bible, my respect for it was profound. It was the word of God, the source of divine instruction and guidance for the human race. Unhesitatingly I would have avowed my belief in its inspiration, though what I would have meant by that term is something that recollection fails to indicate. In a word, during my adolescent years I was an avowed and professing Protestant, a thorough conformist.

That there was such a thing as the Catholic Church, I was, of course, dimly aware. My childhood and youth were passed without any more contact with the actual Church than my acquaintance with a single Catholic family, though fortunately the example there was solidly edifying. By-passing this exception, however, I swallowed in its entirety the general verdict of my friends and associates, that Catholics were people on a lower social level than ourselves, ignorant and inferior, held in durance vile by the evil machinations of the hierarchy. Some day, unquestionably, their emancipation would come (emancipation was still a word to conjure with) and they would all become good and enlightened Protestants.

With the sophomorism of youth I condemned the Church as hopelessly out of date and obscurantist. Quite possibly the first centuries of Christianity were blameless, though my ignor-

ance of the history of the early Church was appalling. Sometime in later centuries, it goes without saying, the Church had yielded to corruption of the worst kind, and had fallen into the hands of leaders who were tyrannical, cruel, and despotic. Hints of the Spanish Inquisition provided the lurid background, and there was always the convenient figure of Pope Alexander VI. Against this nightmare of religious degradation, I reasoned, an enlightened Europe had at last revolted. Where the Church retained some semblance of her power, there the same old evils were continued. My contempt was particularly marked, good democratic-republican that I was, for the monarchial powers of Catholic officialdom. This was the negation of the democratic ideal, and the mainspring of the utter servility of Catholics everywhere. My analysis was devastating, and made up in cocksureness what it lacked in originality.

It is interesting to recall now the strength of my dislike for the ceremonial of the Catholic Church, especially since at the time my acquaintance with that phase of the liturgy was entirely theoretical. But from what I had heard, it was easy to denounce it out of hand as a relic of empty formalism. Never having met or even seen a priest, my judgment bore heavily upon the reputed greed of all who wore the Roman collar, upon their alleged habit of charging for confessions, and upon the dubiousness of their morals generally. I should add that few of these prejudices were derived from my parents themselves. They did not like the Catholic Church, but they refrained from back-stairs gossip.

With this as my religious frame of reference I went to college. This was a sound Methodist institution in the heart of Iowa, the type of school that believed in fundamental education and instilled precepts of severe self-discipline. As I recall my freshman year, it was a period of quiescence; there was little that disturbed the even tenor of my theological prepossessions. For myself, as for the majority of my fellow-students,

there was the smug assurance that Protestantism was the only possible way of life, offering, as it seemed to do, the maximum of security in the relatively untroubled world of the early 20th century. We would emerge, unquestionably, as the anointed leaders of our communities, the continental Pharisees. I cannot remember any particular religious fervor as a characteristic of my life during this phase, but simply a bland satisfaction with things as they were.

To the best of my recollection, it must have been somewhere along the course of my second year in college that the first rumblings of doubt began to make themselves heard in the recesses of my mind. The original source of the disturbance was the "Revival," which was then, and for many years thereafter, an accepted feature of Mid-Western Protestantism. The recurrence of these periodic religious orgies began to arouse my distaste, and it was not long until they awakened an active disgust. They began to impress me as crude and sensational, quite the opposite of anything I could conceive as a fitting expression of Christianity, and certainly as an unstable and highly emotional method of confessing religious convictions. If this were actually the substance of religion, I thought, and its effect on me was so adverse, perhaps there was something lacking in my approach. These musings, half-formulated, continued to bother me, though I shared my disturbance with none of my companions in college.

As time went on, moreover, my difficulties became greater. Other features of the popular Protestantism of the day began to annoy me. There was, for example, the matter of extemporaneous prayers, and there was the exasperating practice of "giving testimony." Attendance at Sunday morning services and the weekly prayer meetings, punctuated with these usages, became increasingly obnoxious. Impromptu prayers, as I analyzed them, seemed to specialize in informing God about what was going on, information which surely He did not need; the testimonies, "see what God has done for me,"

impressed me as a macabre kind of boasting. Neither struck me as reverent or properly humble. Even today, after the lapse of all the years, my dislike for them remains as strong as ever; my advice to Protestant leaders, if it were sought, would be to jettison them. They started me on my way out of Protestantism, and they have had the same effect on many others. (If such advice seems inconsistent with my secure happiness in the Catholic Church, then I hasten to express my gratitude for these irritating features.

The story of my religious discontent would not be complete without at least a brief reference to my reaction to the puritanism with which I was surrounded. There were the so-called "questionable amusements," for instance, such as card playing and dancing. I was brought up in the belief that to take part in them was wrong and unChristian. It was a matter of conscience. Even in college such was the current interpretation of Christianity. At first, as in all other departments of thinking and behavior, I was a strict conformist and a sincere one. It was only a matter of time, however, until the denunciation of "questionable amusements," following other and more important features of my religious environment, should come in for its share of criticism and challenge. It may well be that the puritanism of my locality was not fully in accord with Protestant theology; I didn't know about that. All I knew was that, practically speaking, the Christian religion was closely bound up and identified with prohibitions. It appeared as a composite of negations.

In the same category was my disapproval, once I started to disapprove, of the prevailing attitude toward even moderate indulgence in tobacco and liquor. This, too, was proscribed as unchristian. As an illustration of the extreme to which such thinking can be carried, I recall the insistence of some of my associates that the wine served at the marriage feast at Cana and the Last Supper was merely grape juice. To the reader of these lines it seems incredible that such an opinion

could have been held in college circles. It was so held, however, and was passed on to me in all seriousness. Need I add that disillusionment was inevitable?

As a college junior my dissatisfaction became so keen that I could no longer refrain from seeking counsel. The faculty members and ministers whom I approached were uniformly kind in their response, but their answers never satisfied me. Even so, my desire to remain within the bounds of conformity, my sense of loyalty to all that I considered my heritage, demanded that I make the best effort I could to accept the proffered solutions.

Some of my questions come to mind: What does it mean to say that "Jesus saves"? I hear my fellow students testify that they have been saved: How do they know? I hear them declare that they have chosen Jesus as their "personal Saviour": What can such a statement mean? Are "questionable amusements" sinful? If so, why? What is my status relative to the Church? Who has authority to tell me that I am bound to attend church services? Who put the books of the Bible together? How do I know that they were inspired? How does it happen that the same Bible is the seed-bed of so many contradictory doctrines? Why cannot religious truth be easily recognized?

Granted that these questions were clumsily stated and were far from boasting analytic maturity, still they embodied the doubts which tortured me. The Protestant critic of today might well say that my failure to find satisfaction in the solutions suggested by my advisers reflected rather upon my judgment than upon the answers themselves. He might insinuate, with some degree of accuracy, that for a young man I was too introspective, that I did not expose my mind with sufficient candor. All I can say is that these doubts and difficulties were painfully real to me. They were no mere passing phase of restless youth. If my mentors in college did not grasp the depth of my disturbance, neither did I myself. I was flounder-

ing in what Bossuet has called the "variations of Protestantism," and I could discover no anchor-hold for my wavering faith.

This was a time of acute spiritual distress. I continued my attendance at the regular services, but my attitude was hardening into one of contemptuous tolerance. Probably the only thing that attracted me to church at all was my pleasure in singing. The sermons and testimonials I sat through with grim cynicism; the extemporaneous prayers I endured with ill-concealed ridicule and scorn. Christianity itself had ceased to evoke my reverence. Doubtless I was conceited and altogether too cocky, a very disagreeable young man going through a very disagreeable experience. However, I kept my thoughts to myself, unwilling to put them into words. They were too frightening. I sat back, detached, fretful, and worried.

A temporary interruption of my college course gave me an opportunity to recoup my finances by accepting a teaching position. This brought me to a small Iowa community where there was a Catholic church. Probably for no other reason than absorption in my own religious problem I found myself reading some of the stock volumes of Catholic apologetics, obtained from newly found Catholic friends. Quite vividly do I recall my first reaction to Cardinal Gibbons' well-known *Faith of Our Fathers*. I read it, though it is doubtful if the book has ever had a more supercilious reader. Its conclusions I dismissed summarily; the Catholic Church was false and had to be false. The thought never crossed my mind that she might have something to offer me; she was the last place I would have considered as a source of truth. Nevertheless, I read on, and in some undefinable way was impressed.

As I look back on those days I remember thinking how utterly foolish it was for anyone to attempt any sort of defense of the Church on the basis of facts or logical deductions, and wondering how on earth this prelate, Cardinal Gibbons, could have the effrontery to try it. Still and all, the ques-

tions he posed were questions that had been disturbing me, and the answers he gave, as I reluctantly admitted, seemed to fill the bill. Because they were Catholic answers, they had to be wrong, but there they were, in black and white, and they held my attention.

The chain of Catholic reasoning annoyed me by its clever linking of fact with fact, deduction with deduction. There was the divinity of Christ, the establishment of a Church by Him, and the conclusion that the Church so founded could never disappear and could not teach error. If the linking was genuine, then the Church must be Christ's Church, authorized to teach me. But of course, I stoutly maintained, there had to be a flaw somewhere. However inevitable the logic, the conclusion could not follow, because my first and last premise was that the Catholic Church was ruled out of court. Not even to myself would I admit that my reading had made a deep and lasting impression upon me. I scoffed at myself for bothering with the Catholic claims at all, but even as I scoffed the fascination grew upon me.

All the bigoted charges that I had ever heard against the Church came back to mind to reinforce my resistance. She was the Scarlet Woman, an imposter, corrupt, even diabolical. Far from being attracted to her, I knew I ought to resent, with all my power, her very existence as an insult to human nature. If, among her impostures, her logic intrigued me, then it was up to me to expose its basic fallacy.

I suppose it must have been at this time that I found myself, one day, actually reasoning in reverse. Since the Church, *a priori,* was false, and inasmuch as I was unable to disprove her foundation by Christ, then it followed that Christ Himself must have been a mere human being, and a misguided one, at that. He could not have been divine, otherwise the Church of His making could not have failed, as it obviously had. Such reverse reasoning pushed me to a denial of Our Lord's divinity. No longer a bumptious collegian, I could not be

happy about this, for it brought a clean break with all Christianity, with the things for which I still retained an unconscious reverence.

If Christ were not God why should I be interested in Christianity, a merely human religion? My mind turned momentarily to the religion of the Chosen People; was there anything there to hold me? The answer came quickly: If Christ and His transcendental claims were false, there was nothing in Judaism that could claim my allegiance. Similarly, the most cursory glance at the other religious systems of mankind sufficed to justify their abrupt dismissal. I felt myself drifting, drifting into skepticism if not into positive atheism. The very ground seemed insecure beneath my feet; my faith in everything seemed to totter. Yet all this while, and the experience continued through several years, I continued, quite inconsistently, though I hope not hypocritically, to attend Protestant church services. It was a way of trying to force myself to hold on, in the desperate hope that some salvation might be held out for me.

Sheer honesty compelled me, ultimately, to face squarely the root problem of Christ's divinity. As I review, at this long remove, the process of my study, with the limited and imperfect means I had at my disposal, the wonder is, not that I reached the correct answer, but that I was able to reach any answer at all. It is quite clear to me now that the grace of God was guiding me through the inadequacies of my equipment and the pitfalls of my imperfect theology to a definite intellectual conviction of the Godhead of Jesus Christ. This was, at any rate, the outcome of my study, the first and firm step along the road. For me, I concluded, Christ was indeed the Emmanuel, the Incarnate Word. He had come into the world to teach, to guide, and to save me, and I was bound to believe what He had taught, bound to obey whatsoever He had commanded, bound to worship Him according to His own terms.

There was no escaping the inevitability of the logic which, once more, brought me squarely up against the Catholic Church. I had to believe in Christ, but, with something bordering on frenzy, I still sought to find a way not to believe in the Church He had founded. I was looking for a comfortable middle course, one that would be Christian but not Catholic.

My struggles to find that way continued for several years after graduation from college, during most of which time I was teaching in the public schools of Iowa. Here are some of the things I did in my anxiety to escape from the impasse in my thinking. On one occasion I remember browsing in a book-store in a large city, and with a small-town youth's respect for the learning of the metropolis, asking the attendant for books on the Catholic Church. I was shown several typical works of apologetics, but I explained hastily that I wanted something against the Church—the strongest to be had. I purchased the books that were offered, hurried home, and read them eagerly. They left me completely cold.

On another occasion I called on the pastor of the Protestant church I was attending at the time. I asked him to let me sing in his choir and to keep me so busy with other activities that I would have no time to worry about the Catholic claims, hoping to discover eventually that they were only a passing illusion. He tried, and I believe I can honestly say that I tried, but it was of no use.

Again, I found myself at a summer encampment of the YMCA, at Lake Geneva, at which prominent Protestant leaders were scheduled to speak and hold conferences. By appointments I called on several of these men, and presented my problem with the distinct plea that they would show me how to "keep out of the Catholic Church." Their answers were varied. Some were patient with me and evidently concerned over my state of mind; others were casual and offhand; one of

them ordered me from his presence. I left more discouraged than before.

Naturally enough, my friends were apprehensive. While I kept my questing to myself as much as possible, it was inevitable that some echoes of my struggle should reach them. In all good faith, I am sure, they did their best to head me off, supplying me with even more horrendous disclosures of the evils of Rome than the bookstore had furnished me. I do not recall now if they descended to Maria Monk, but Pere Hyacinth was a fairly recent discovery in those days, along with Alfred Loisy and others of the current Modernist dissenting group. Alas, they were wasting their efforts so far as I was concerned. With ever waning hope, I still consulted men I felt I could trust, ministers and former college professors; always the result was the same, a growing feeling of the inevitability of the step which I yet refused to take.

It was out of such processes of thinking that I was ultimately brought squarely up against a startling question: Is there nothing between the Catholic religion and atheism? If the former is rejected does the latter become inevitable? Is there no middle ground? Is the Catholic faith the only way of saving me from the loss of all faith and the repudiation of all religion? Is it God's way of saving me and all other men from cynicism and despair? The answer was unescapable. With conclusive finality I admitted to myself that there was nothing between Christ and chaos, nothing between the Catholic faith and atheism.

The realization then struck me that I had been playing the part of a coward. Why should I be afraid of the Catholic Church? If facts and logic converged upon her, if reason demanded her as the answer to my problem, why should I allow my worn-out prejudices to stand in the way? I made up my mind to be fully honest with myself, to face the realities of the situation without flinching. The moment I made that

resolution the doubts disappeared. As I was to learn later, I had begun to cooperate with the grace of God.

It was then, as I remember in clear detail, that I reviewed once more the whole process of my thinking. Starting all over again, I set down the premises which were undebatable. As though it were yesterday, I recall sketching my analysis: I believe in God; I need to be taught the truths which He wishes me to believe; since Christ is God and came on earth to teach me this truth, it is to Him I must look. But how does Christ teach me? There could be, I answered, only three ways: 1. By direct and personal revelation: 2. Through a written record (the Sacred Scripture): 3. Through the agency of men, that is, through an organization commissioned by Him for that purpose.

Did Christ, I asked, teach me by direct revelation? Not that I was aware. Furthermore, if, in spite of this insensitiveness on my part, He really had chosen this means, then He must teach all men in the same way. Honesty of intention and the sincere desire to hear His voice would be the only prerequisites. But how, then, could the fact be explained away that so many men of obvious and unquestionable good will held so many and such contradictory beliefs? With a gesture of finality, I discarded the first possibility.

Did He teach me through the Bible? Here was old ground, well-trodden, thoroughly mulled over. But how was I to know that it was the Bible, the inspired record of God's dealings with men? Perhaps it contained much spurious matter; perhaps its canon was uncertain—books left out which should have been retained, books incorporated which should be rejected. Again, how could I know the real meaning of the many disputed passages? There were, I reminded myself, over two hundred religious groups all claiming the Bible as their font and origin, all asserting their particular interpretations as correct. My common sense repeated, what I already knew, that Christ must have appointed some agent to com-

pose the Sacred Scripture and to interpret its meaning for all men.

Why should I gag, then, at considering calmly and dispassionately the possibility of the third answer, even if it led directly to the Catholic Church? Who else could this appointed teacher be? What could she be but infallible? My right to certitude was as great as that of the fortunate few who heard the Master speak, who saw Him pass along the way. And if He was in truth divine, and if He had appointed His agents to teach and govern and sanctify in His name, He could not help but make them share His infallibility. I needed no Biblical texts to bolster my assurance that His Church was founded upon a rock; it could not be otherwise. Her infallibility was as inevitable and as unescapable as His own. It was His own.

Perhaps this is the correct point in my narrative to indicate explicitly how I reacted to the stock argument against the Catholic Church. As my decision became apparent it was unavoidable that I should be asked for explanations. Why was I attracted to the Church? Did I not know that she had ingloriously failed? How could I get around the facts of history? No doubt the reader is thoroughly informed about the oft repeated premise that the Catholic Church had been untrue to her divine calling and had failed some time during the early centuries or Middle Ages. (There is no agreement among the critics about when the failure occurred.) The Church fell into evil ways, the argument continues; her ministers became selfish, dishonorable, and corrupt, even a few of the Popes falling into public sins. According to the argument, further, the Church departed from the original Gospel of Christ and introduced spurious doctrines of faith. Therefore, the argument concludes, the Church lost the grace of God and the authority to speak as His agent. A reformation was necessary. The old Church had to be abandoned; a new

organization (or organizations?) was needed to lead Christianity back to its pristine purity.

Over and over again I had heard and read this argument. As it failed to hold me back, my friends asked why. Was I ignoring it? Had I closed my mind to obvious facts? Let me say most emphatically that I had not ignored the argument. I had analyzed and studied it to the best of my ability. The result? The more I thought about it the more illogical it seemed. How was it possible, I asked, for the Church to fail when the divine Lord had guaranteed that she would not fail? But then there were the evil deeds of the Church leaders. What about them? They could not be erased from the record. They were there for all to see and contemplate. Were they not conclusive? They seemed to be conclusive for others; why not for me?

Perhaps these facts were conclusive for me; but if so, it was in the other direction. If they proved anything it was that the Catholic Church is indestructible. She must be solid indeed, I reasoned, not to have been destroyed. The Church had lived through enough calamities to annihilate a mere human institution. The salient fact is that the Church had lived through them, a feat of survival which becomes more extraordinary the more the historical mistakes are played up. The sad experiences of the Church, to which my attention had been called, only demonstrated her divine nature. Far from frightening me away from the Church, they helped open the door for me.

In this same connection there was the defensive claim of the Church that she had not written into her doctrines any effect of the misdeeds of her leaders. Was this true? Let me admit frankly that when this question first came to my mind the facts were hopelessly confused. Posing the question, however, set me in search of facts and pointed my thinking in, what I now know to have been, the right direction. I knew of other institutions that had accommodated themselves

to the records and mistakes of their representatives. In fact, such was the usual experience. Was it true that the Catholic Church was different? Was she the one institution in human history that was foolproof, the one institution that could not be contaminated by the mistakes, no matter how great, of people and clergy?

What about the Biblical proof that the Church had amended the Gospel and introduced new doctrines? I had been told repeatedly that if I would only read the Bible with an open mind I would see for myself the falsity of Catholic doctrines. By the time in my conversion when this paragraph is pertinent, I had become very impatient with all efforts to disprove the Catholic Church from the Bible. How could the non-Catholic critic, I asked, interpret texts of Scripture more accurately than the Catholic Church? What possible advantage did he have? Could he read Greek manuscripts any better than Catholic scholars? Did he understand New Testament conditions and its Hebrew background any better? Was he in closer touch with Apostolic times? Did he have more complete knowledge of early Church history? The questions answered themselves. All the advantage was on the side of the Church. She had not broken with the past, as the critic had done. She had preserved an unbroken continuity through all generations back to the Apostles. Leaving aside the divine and supernatural protection against error, as promised by our Lord, the Church had every human and natural advantage in defining the doctrines of faith.

As a matter of course, my attention was called to particular doctrines. How could I believe in praying for the dead? How could I believe in the infallibility of the Pope, in the Eucharist, in Indulgences, in the veneration of Saints, and in the resurrection of the body? How could I confess my sins to a priest? How could I harmonize the pageantry and elaborate ceremonial of the Church with the humble simplicity of early Christianity? These and other similar

questions, which seemed to be particularly interesting to my contemporaries, were put to me. I answered them as best I could. If the truth must be told, however, I did not consider myself capable of running down all the evidence for or against particular doctrines and practices. Such a task would have been prodigious. My mind kept insisting that the way to find the doctrines of faith was to trace down to them from our Lord and His Church rather than up to them from my self and my limited knowledge.

In fairness to myself let me say by way of parenthesis that the more I considered and thought about particular doctrines, those that had been held before me in warning, the more reasonable they seemed. And yet, I continued to insist, they were true not because I happened to like them but because the Church taught them. As I tried to explain to those who cross-examined me, I had reached the point where I was compelled by force of logic to believe whatever the Church taught whether I liked it or not and whether it seemed reasonable or not. My thought was centered in Christ and His Church. If He was divine and if He established a Church, facts which I could no longer doubt, then it followed that I was bound to be a member of that Church and to believe what she taught. I must accept the doctrines of the Church precisely because they were doctrines of the Church.

So it was that at last I took the step toward which all my thinking had pointed through six years of troubled doubting and distress of soul. Finding myself in Chicago, in the autumn of 1912, enrolled in the law school of the University of Chicago, I sought out the nearest Catholic rectory, (St. Thomas the Apostle). I introduced myself to the priest who met me in the parlor, (Rev. Michael Shea), and asked for admission into the Catholic Church, expressing my eagerness to take all the instructions which were required. My time for reading was limited, but the fundamentals were already so fixed in my mind that all the rest followed with the ease

of completing a picture-puzzle once the key had been discovered. I am afraid I was a somewhat disappointing convert to my instructor. My battles were all over before I had rung his door-bell.

Here I must pause to relate one very unusual and pleasing incident. Shortly after I began my formal instructions in the catechism, a few good friends prevailed upon me to consult a certain prominent Protestant minister who lived near the University. They were disturbed about me and hoped that with the help of the minister they could turn me aside from my charted course. So it was that one evening, with these friends, I engaged in a long discussion about religion; it lasted half of the night. In the discussion I was not only outnumbered, about four to one, I was outpointed. I was sure that I had made a poor showing of my reasons for becoming a Catholic. At the conclusion of the session, however, the minister made a most extraordinary statement, one that must have surprised my friends as completely as it did me: "My advice for you," he said, "is to go into the Catholic Church as soon as possible. Your mind is Catholic. You can be nothing else." If I could recall his name, I would publicize it now, in appreciation of his broadmindedness.

My baptism (January 1913) was a private ceremony witnessed by the priest and my sponsor only. My first Communion at an early Mass the next morning likewise was unnoticed, as I expected and wished. No one was interested in what I was doing. My coming into the Catholic Church was unannounced. It attracted no attention; it deserved none.

The rest of my story, being aside from the purpose of this present writing, may be dismissed with a few words. Sometime in the spring of 1913 I engaged to teach at the University of Utah, in Salt Lake City. When I came here in the fall of that same year I had not the slightest expectation that from then on my life would be set in Utah. The only plan I had, in so far as I can remember, was to teach

here a year or two and then take more post-graduate work in my newly chosen department, that of Public Speaking, looking to some higher scholastic degrees.

It was soon apparent, however, that God and my own inclinations had charted an entirely different course for me. One day I was suddenly aware of a discovery, the discovery that the only thing that I was really interested in was the Catholic religion. I thought about it; talked about it, whenever I could find a listener; I read about it; I consulted priests to learn more about it; I was deeply concerned about its welfare; I wished to be a factor in its progress. I found myself impatient with non-Catholics, amazed that they could resist the magnificent appeal and logical claims of the Church. Perhaps, I said to myself, if I could state clearly and correctly the position of the Church, perhaps some day I could win other converts to her fold. Here was a new challenge. Together with the realization that the Catholic Church meant more to me than anything and everything else in the world it led me to the necessity of another decision.

This time I made no effort to resist the will of God. After a reasonable period of testing myself, necessary for certainty, I called on the Bishop of Salt Lake, the Most Reverend Joseph S. Glass, C.M. D.D., and asked to be adopted as a seminarian. Being accepted, I was sent to St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California, where I studied under the Sulpician Fathers. I was ordained in June of 1920 for the Diocese of Salt Lake.

If certain of my former Protestant friends and acquaintances chance to read this story, I trust that they will find in it the answer to the question which at one time was in their minds. They wondered, some of them at least, if I would not be disappointed in the Church. Well do I remember the warning they held over me. I was attracted to the Church, they insisted, only because I did not know her as she really was. Some day, if I should enter the Church, which God forbid, I would be sadly disillusioned. Then, when it was

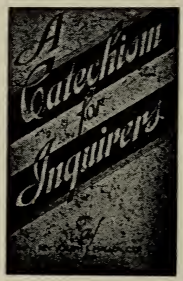
too late, the real character of the Church would be exposed, with the mask of virtue torn off. What a pity for me to choose a course which could have but one end, heartaches and bitter regrets!

On the other hand, there were one or two close friends who were most helpful to me, a help which I wish I could acknowledge to them directly. They gave me the opportunity, through repeated discussions and arguments, to clarify my thinking. They understood the problem I was trying to solve and, although they did not approve the step I was contemplating, they expected me to be honest and to follow my conscience. They would be genuinely sorry if the Catholic faith had not proved to be the answer to my quest.

If any reassurance is needed for them let it be seen in my life as a priest. As to whether or not my priesthood has been and is useful, only God can judge. But at least it gives me the opportunity to save my own soul. Certainly it is a thrilling adventure. It demands the best that I have, indeed far more than I or any other man has to give, but its rewards are superlative.

I close with this further comment. The more I know about the Church the more do I regret that I lost so much time coming within her fold. Without intending the slightest reflection on my parents, I have wished many times that I had had the good fortune to be born and reared a Catholic. Perhaps my point of view is sufficiently expressed in the motto I chose to mark my episcopacy: "Through the Church to God."

For convert work . . .



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